

Unfashioned Creatures: A New Play

An Honors Thesis (HONR 499)

by

Sarah Paradise

Thesis Advisor
Jennifer Blackmer

A large, elegant handwritten signature in black ink, reading "J Blackmer". The signature starts with a large, looping capital "J" and ends with a long, horizontal flourish.

Ball State University
Muncie, Indiana

April 2014

Expected Date of Graduation

May 2014

Undergrad
Thesis
LD
2489
.Z4
2014
.P37

Abstract

Mary Shelley's book *Frankenstein* is quite hard to read today; not because of its length or language, but because it is hard to shake the many images that fill our minds when we hear the word "Frankenstein." There have been many versions of the book, in movie and play form, and it is often referred to in pop culture. In the original novel, Frankenstein the scientist is simply a man on a quest to try to bring someone back to life who then turns his back on his creation. The relationship between Frankenstein and his Creature is complex, not unlike that of a romantic relationship. The people we love change us, whether we want to change or not. What happens when we change *for* someone and then blame him or her for "creating" the person we become? As Victor says in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, "we are unfashioned creatures, but half made up." Who makes up the rest of us? Using the metaphor of Frankenstein and his Creature, my play *Unfashioned Creatures* explores these questions through one relationship that is long over and one that has hardly begun.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank all those who ever read the play and advised me on it, particularly the members of “Little Fun Writing Group Thingy.” Without your encouragement and willingness to read it for yet *another* time, this would not be possible.

I want to thank Greg Cox, who directed the final reading of the show, and Jillian Leff, Joe Lino, Emily Lindberg, and Molly Wagner who lent their talents to the roles. It could not have come to life without their dedication. I would also like to mention Talley Gale, who volunteered her time to be an understudy when necessary. I am truly grateful.

I would also like to thank my thesis advisor, Jen Blackmer, who took the time out of her incredibly busy semester to make sure I got the guidance I needed.

Author's Statement

For my senior Honors College project, I wrote a full-length play and presented it to the public. *Unfashioned Creatures* got its start on a lonely car ride from Piqua, OH back to Muncie, IN. I had gone to see Danny Boyle's filmed stage adaptation of *Frankenstein* in a movie theater and, on the way back, I began to think about the relationship between Victor Frankenstein and his Creature. The Creature only wanted to be accepted by his creator; if Victor had just done that, he could have avoided the destruction the Creature caused in his life. This kind of relationship seemed to me to be mirrored in some failed romantic relationships; all one partner wants is acceptance but the other cannot give that for whatever reason. I began to imagine a fictional couple with this problem, named Ben and Elizabeth, and their story began.

My approach to completing this play was to first start by writing a literal conversation about *Frankenstein*. In the second scene of the play, Elizabeth compares Ben to Frankenstein, saying that he has "made" or "shaped" his new girlfriend into exactly who he wants her to be. After completing this conversation, I had a better idea of the metaphor I wanted to follow throughout the show. If Ben is Frankenstein, then Elizabeth is the Creature and Cassie, the new girlfriend, is Elizabeth Lavenza, Frankenstein's wife in the novel. From there, I worked with each part of the play to mirror the *Frankenstein* story as much as possible. Elizabeth appears at Ben's door one day, much like the Creature coming to Frankenstein's home in the novel to confront him. Though Elizabeth does not kill Cassie the way the Creature killed Elizabeth Lavenza, she does try to snap her neck in a metaphorical manner, by telling Cassie about Ben's failings as a fiancé. Most importantly, Ben and Frankenstein share a quest for perfection. Ben is

searching for perfection in writing; he once began writing a great novel but abandoned the project because it was never quite right. Victor Frankenstein searched for perfection in science, but when it was not exactly what he wanted, he ran away from his discovery and abandoned his Creature. I veered away from the novel as a model most at the end of the play, when Ben does not die like Frankenstein, metaphorically or otherwise, but rather takes up his quest once more to write the perfect novel. With this ending, I propose that his relationship to his work, and to Elizabeth, may not be quite over.

Like many artists and scholars, I set out to ease my mind and synthesize some of my experiences through research and exploration while working on *Unfashioned Creatures*. Not unlike Frankenstein's own journey, I went on a quest for knowledge and to achieve something monumental, but what I found was not quite what I expected. It was scary, dark, and unpredictable, like the Creature. Although my play did not try to physically harm my loves ones or I, it has taken a toll on both my mind and my spirit. As a mentor once told me, in order to make art that will be cathartic for both you and your audience, "it has to hurt." I used my own personal experiences as a woman and a scholar to inform the relationships between Ben and the two women. I tried particularly to tap into Ben's intelligence and explore the intoxication of finding an intellectual equal in the world. I often found it difficult to separate the story of my play from the novel *Frankenstein*, but just as often, it seemed impossible to keep them connected. Maintaining this balance between my source material and the final product was the most challenging aspect of the project, but it encouraged me to make informed choices about what moments best served my story and what was essential to the metaphor of *Frankenstein*.

My thesis project culminated in a final performance of the play in the style of a staged reading. On March 29th, 2014 I invited the public to come hear my play and then discuss it with me afterwards. I picked the director for the show myself, as well as the four actors that would read Ben, Elizabeth, Cassie, and stage directions. The rehearsal process was informative for me because I am accustomed to being in the room for rehearsals as an actor. As the writer, I was welcome to come observe and make adjustments to the script, but it was not required. Collaboration has been a large part of my life, both in the Department of Theatre and Dance and the Honors College, and this opportunity to collaborate on my own written work synthesized the knowledge I have gained about collaboration in my time at Ball State. I was encouraged to hand over control of my script to the director and actors who would interpret it based entirely on what I had written down. This was challenging but also exhilarating because it gave me the chance to work with artists I trusted, who came to me when they had specific questions but took artistic ownership of the product as much as I did.

Unfashioned Creatures challenged me to work closely with the source material and balance it with the story I wanted to tell. The play required me to sort through my own experiences as they related to my subject and collaborate with other artists to create the final product. The play is the culmination of what I have learned as an acting student and an Honors College student, and I have created a theatrical product of which I am quite proud. Once I graduate, I plan to submit the play to different theaters that may be interested in producing it and I hope it has a long life beyond this.

References

Shelley, Mary Wollstonecraft. *Frankenstein*. New York City: Scholastic Inc, n.d. Print.